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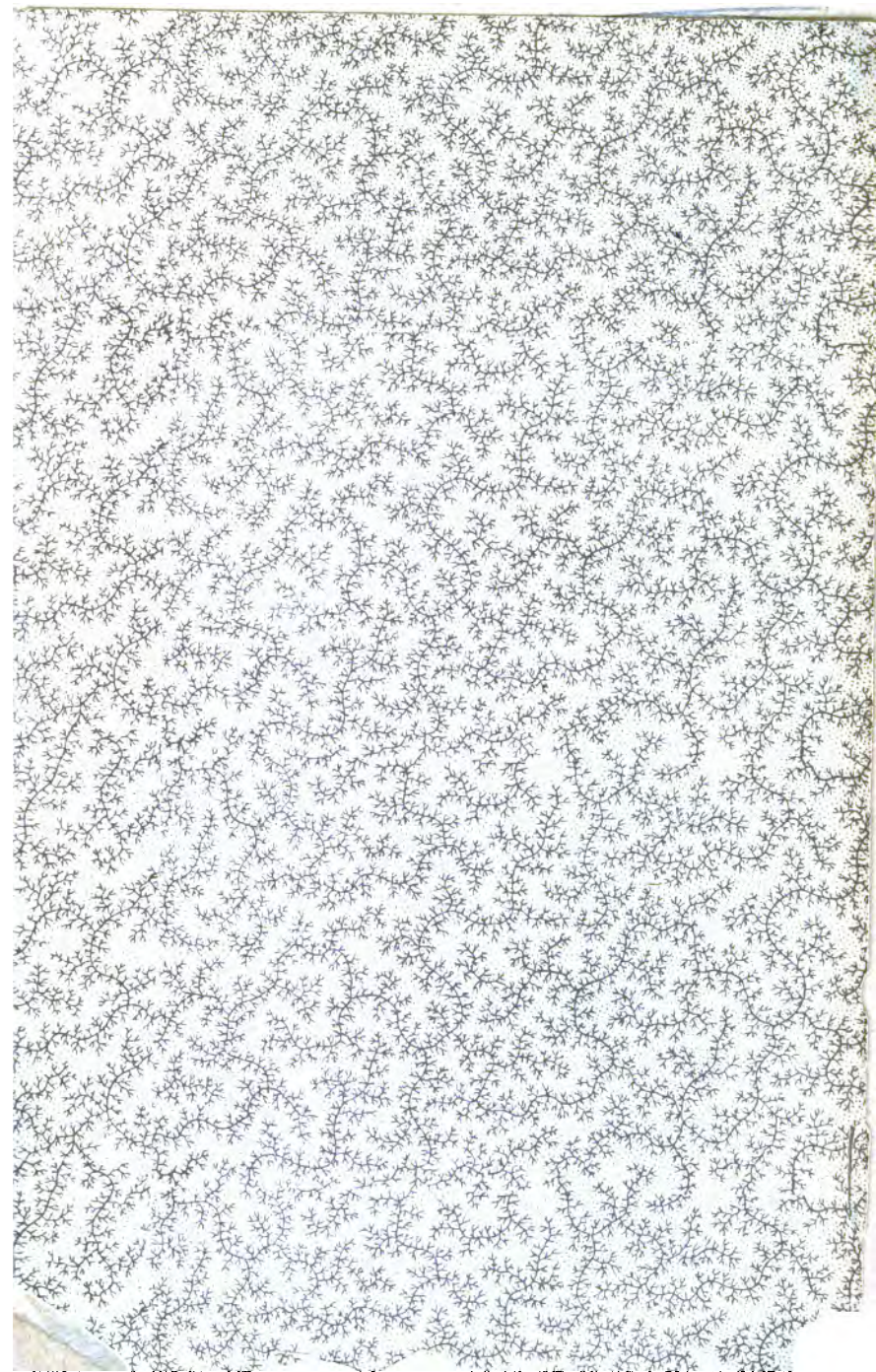
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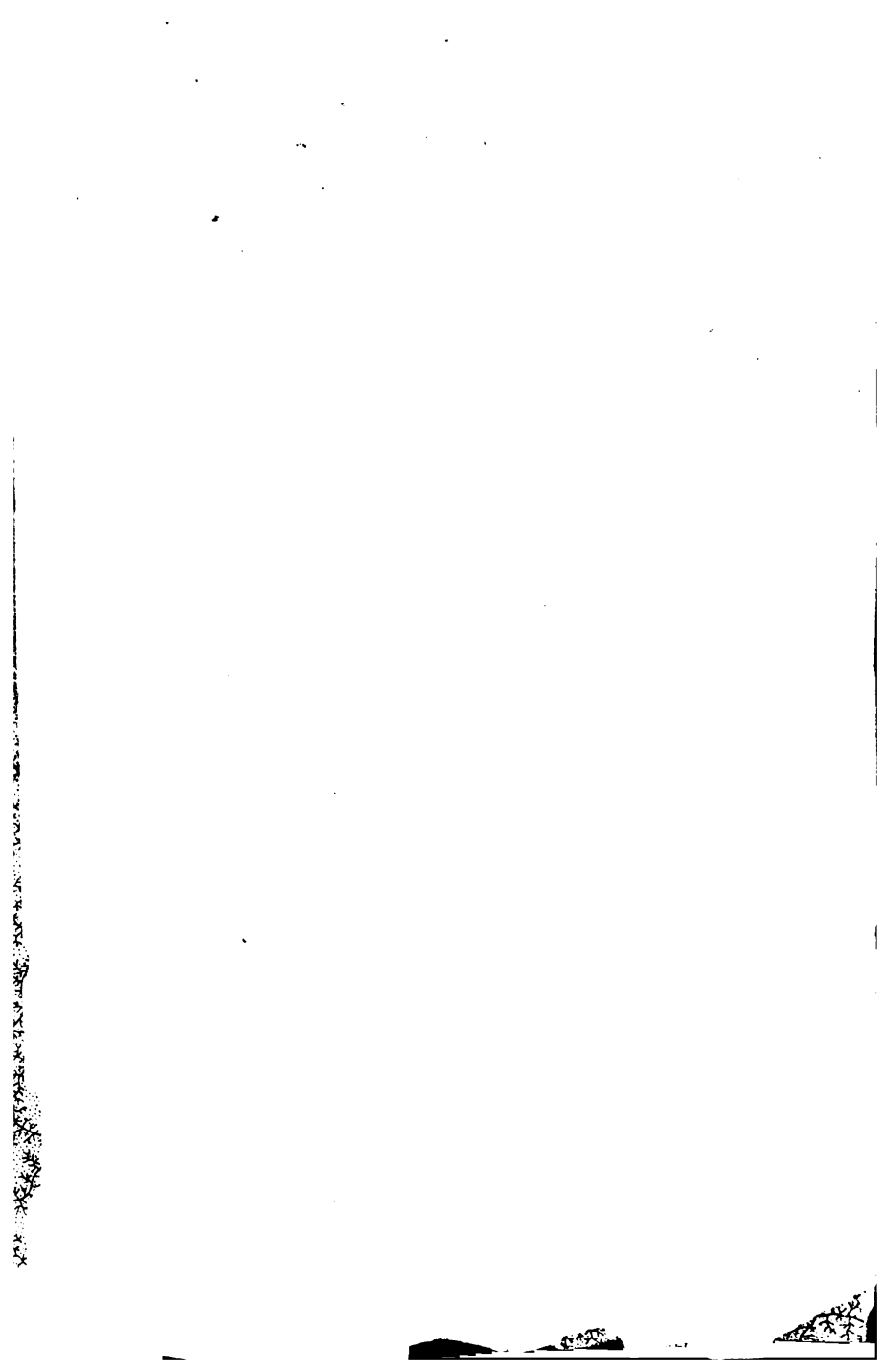
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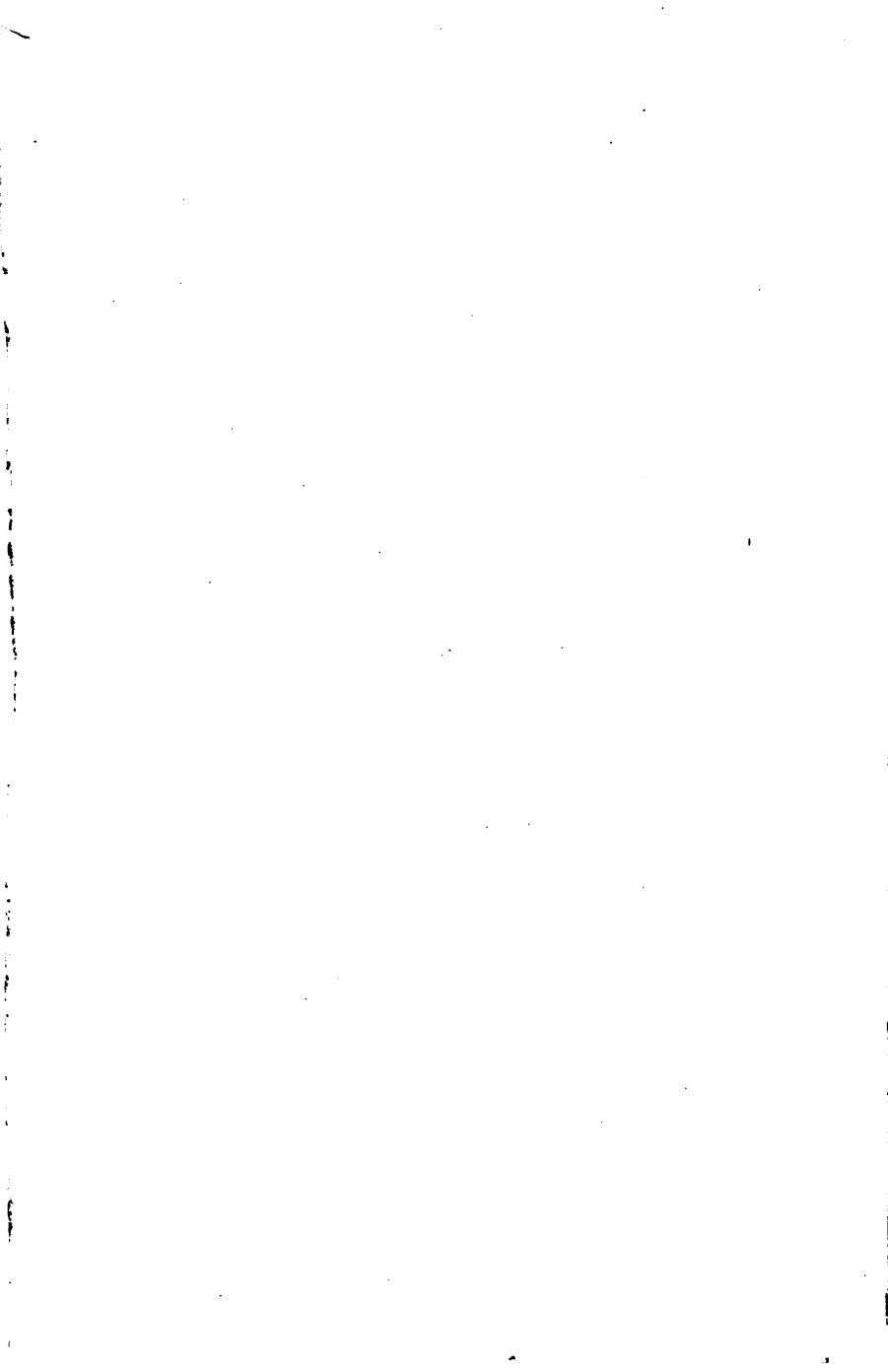
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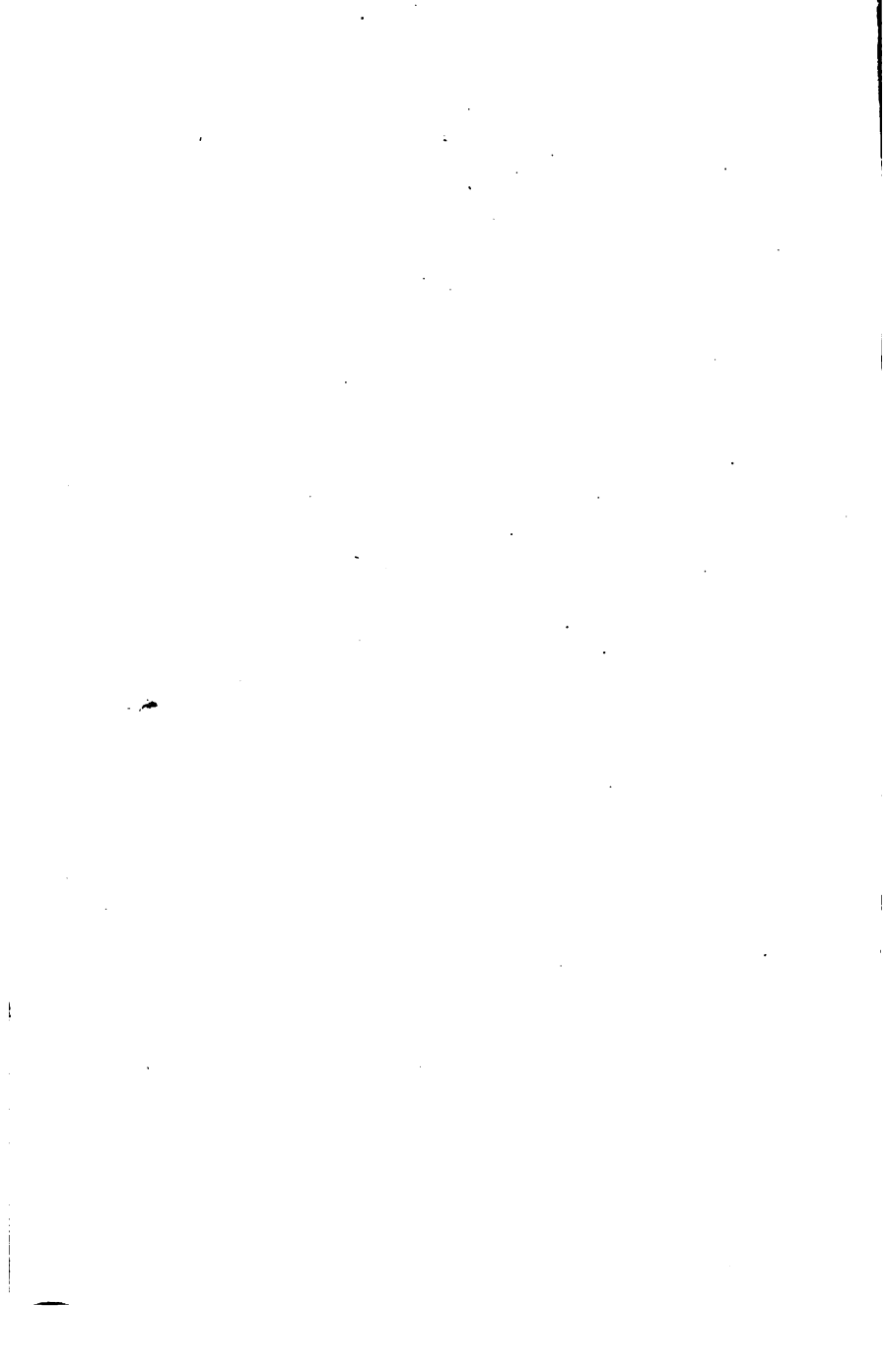
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A FEW INCIDENTS

IN THE LIFE OF

PROFESSOR JAMES P. ESPY,

BY HIS NIECE,

MRS. L. M. MOREHEAD.

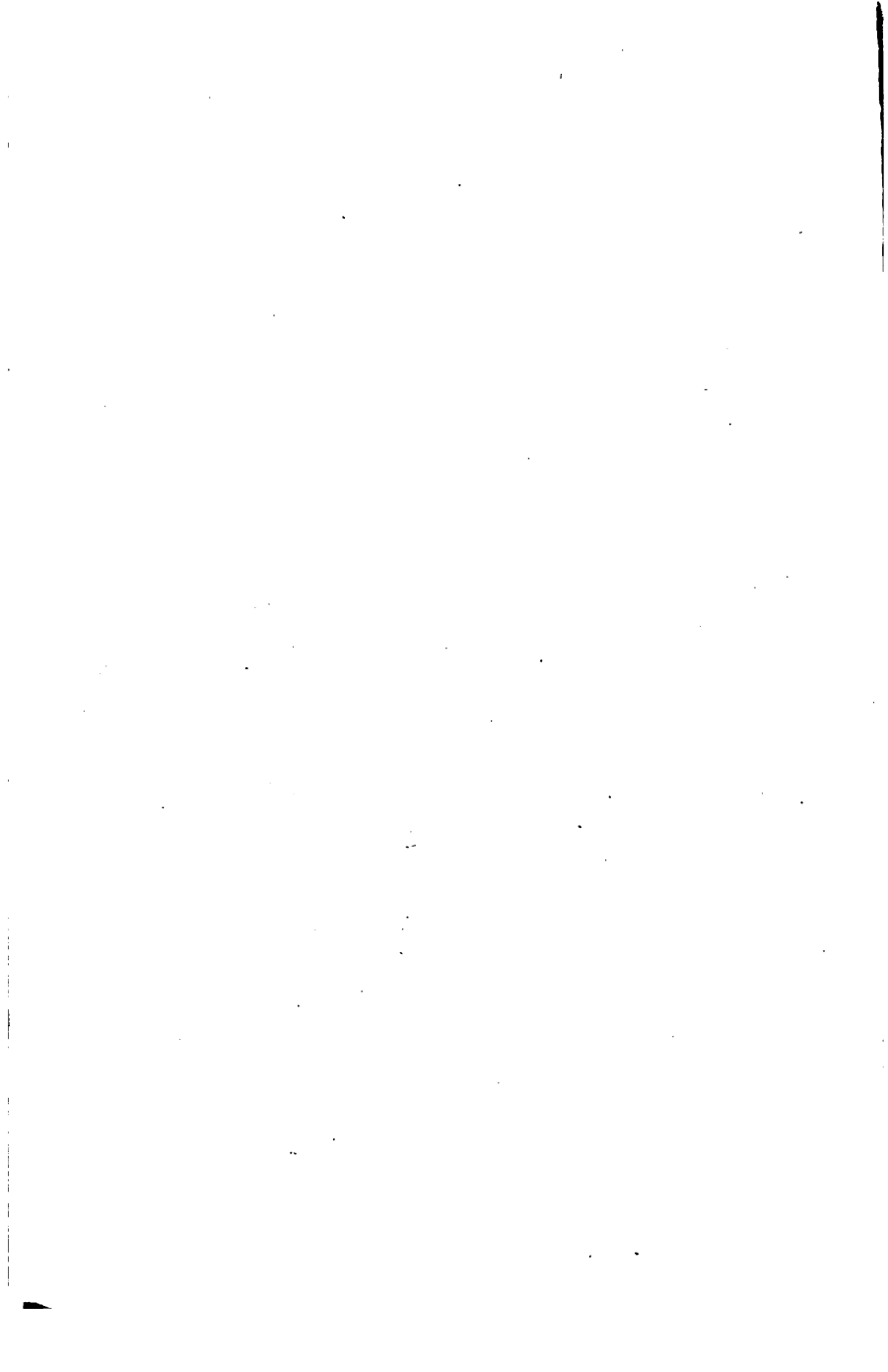
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## PREFACE.

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As an outgrowth of this era of Centennial celebrations, books of personal recollections are pouring from the press in rapid succession, while "relics, reminiscences, and reminders" of past days flood the country. In order to make these volumes salable and to catch the ear of the gossip-loving community, items of mere hearsay are eagerly seized upon by these compilers, and embodied as facts and incidents in the lives of individuals who had been so fortunate as to have achieved distinction in any of the various walks of life.

In the reminiscences of B. Perley Poore, quite recently issued from the press, there appears a strange misstatement in a short sketch of the life

of the distinguished meteorologist, Prof. James P. Espy, to the effect that his education had been so neglected that at the age of seventeen he could not read!" In justice to his parents—people of education—and to his relatives now long passed away, who, at different times in the long ago, filled important positions in the then centers of learning, I would correct this error.

COLUMBUS, OHIO, *January*, 1888.

## A FEW INCIDENTS

IN THE LIFE OF

# Professor James P. Espy,

THE EMINENT SCIENTIST.

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JAMES P. ESPY was born in Cumberland county, Pennsylvania, but, when a mere infant, his father, having become financially embarrassed by the depreciation in value of the old Continental currency, resolved to remove to Kentucky, its grand rivers and blue-grass pastures then offering to the emigrant a sort of Eldorado; but, being of Huguenot descent (the name originally had the French termination, spelled Espie), he found the institution of slavery distasteful, both to his prejudices and to his principles, and, after a few years, having purchased a tract of land in the beautiful Miami valley, he removed to Ohio.

While a resident of Kentucky, his eldest daughter married Mr. Joseph Simpson, of Mt. Sterling, brother to the late Judge Simpson, of the Court of Appeals of that state, and with this sister, his youngest son, James, remained for better advantages of education than could be secured at that time in Ohio, and was, "at eighteen," a student at Transylvania University, in Lexington.

When his father removed to the west, one of the brothers remained in Pennsylvania with his uncle, Col. David Espy, at that time Prothonotary of Bedford county, by whom he was adopted, and with whom he studied law, and was admitted to practice in the courts of the state. In 1805, this brother, Josiah M. Espy, made the long journey into Ohio and Kentucky to visit his relatives, from whom he had, since boyhood, been separated by what was then called "a wilderness," so little was then known of that fertile territory. He traveled on horseback through



those almost uninhabited regions, now so populous, keeping a journal of the events of his lonely ride. This memorandum was published in 1870, by Robert Clarke & Co., of Cincinnati, as "Miscellany No. 1, of the Ohio Valley Historical Series." It is a very interesting picture of the then almost unbroken country and of the state of society so far from the sources of intellectual culture at that period. After describing Lexington and the beauty and fertility of the country adjacent, Mr. Josiah Espy adds: "Here I met my brother James, whom I had not seen since he was an infant. I found him at the University, where he had made considerable progress in the dead languages and in general science. He shows an ardent desire for knowledge, and promises to be both intelligent and useful." According to the dates in this diary, the youth, when the brothers met, must have been about eighteen. After a few years of close application he graduated, and immediately joined his family

1857

in Ohio, where he commenced the study of law while teaching school in Xenia. His love for teaching amounted to enthusiasm, and, although he completed his law studies, he finally abandoned the idea of choosing the law as his profession, and determined to follow the bent of his inclination and become a conscientious instructor of youth. The writer has talked with one of those old pupils, who bore warm testimony to the interest he ever awakened in the minds of those under his care, and to his latest years he considered it a noble profession, and even in old age was fond of drawing out young students to talk over their lessons with him, "both hearing them and asking them questions."

When Mr. Espy was about twenty-five years of age, he decided to return to his native state, where he felt he could avail himself of more abundant facilities for the acquirement of scientific knowledge—from early youth a strong craving of his nature. He went at once to Bed-



ford, Pennsylvania, and, through the influence of his relatives there, was appointed principal of the academy at Cumberland, Maryland, which position he filled with credit to himself and satisfaction to the intelligent board of trustees. There he married Miss Margaret Pollard, the accomplished woman who shared with him through a long life his triumphs and success, dying but a few years before her husband. Had this devoted wife been the survivor, there is little doubt but that an accurate sketch of his life would have been long since given to the world, thus preventing such gross mistakes and misstatements as this imperfect sketch has endeavored to rectify. Let us hope, however, that it may meet the eye of at least some of those who have read the amusing but rather sensational book of the old journalist.

During the first few years succeeding the establishment of the "Smithsonian Institute," Prof. Henry and Prof. Espy were intimately associated

as co-regents in its management, and between them there always existed a warm friendship. It is not many years since the writer of this sketch sat by Prof. Henry at a charming dinner party on K street, opposite the beautiful Franklin square, in Washington, when, after some pleasant reminiscences of their old association, the genial old professor remarked: "There is no question in my mind but that Prof. Espy should be regarded as the father of the present signal service of the United States, his 'Theory of Storms' having led the way to its establishment and present success," adding, "that the charts now used in the service were identical (with some slight modifications) with those the old Storm King constructed for use in the Meteorological Bureau of the War Department when he was at its head."

Gen. Myers (Old Probabilities) made a similar statement to the writer at one of Mrs. Hayes' charming receptions—when an evening spent at

the White House in the famed "blue room" was a pleasure not soon to be forgotten.

Among the relatives of Prof. Espy, of whom mention has been made of having filled important positions in educational centers, I can recall two cousins, nephews of his mother, Dr. Matthew Brown and his son, Rev. Samuel Brown, who were successively presidents of Jefferson College, Pennsylvania, an old institution from whose walls have gone out many men who have attained great distinction in the various walks of life.

The picturesque old town of Bedford was, in Colonial days, the home of many of Prof. Espy's relatives. His uncle, Col. David Espy, removed there early in life, where he became quite prominent in public affairs—was an officer in the War of the Revolution; a deputy to the Provincial Conference held in Philadelphia, in June, 1775; also a member of the Council of Safety in 1776; afterward, prothonotary and one of the justices

of the county; a member of the general assembly of the state, and one of the original trustees of Dickinson College. At his hospitable home Gen. Washington was entertained as a guest, when, during that strange episode in the history of Pennsylvania, called "The Whisky Insurrection," the illustrious chief passed through the old Colonial outpost, en route to Pittsburgh. "Fort Bedford," as it was then called, was an outpost, during the French and Indian War, of Gen. Braddock's army, and the old stone-house built for the officers of George the Third is still to be seen. The Mineral Springs, about a mile from the village, so fashionable a resort more than fifty years ago and a most lovely spot, was often visited by Prof. Espy, during the twenty years of his residence in Philadelphia, where he had charge of the classical department of the Franklin Institute. While enjoying these summer vacations, he was happy in the society of his elder brother, Josiah, who was a resident of



Bedford until 1827, when he removed with his family to Columbus, Ohio. A warm friendship existed between these brothers through a long life.

In 1836, Prof. Espy visited Columbus, and while there, at the request of many of its citizens, he delivered a lecture, explanatory of his "Philosophy of Storms." It was largely attended, and afforded much subject for conversation in that intelligent community, exciting great interest as being both novel and plausible. During his residence in Philadelphia, he became absorbed in his investigations of the phenomena of the atmosphere which led to his discovery of "The Philosophy of Storms," and which, when first made known to the world, gained for him the soubriquet of "The Storm King." An old friend of the professor and fellow scientist, who visited him often at his house on Chestnut street, described to the writer his method of pursuing these atmospherical calculations, which necessa-

rily must be carried on out of doors. The high fence inclosing the small yard was of smooth plank, painted white, while the space inclosed was filled with vessels of water, and numerous thermometers for determining the "dew point." The white fence, when last seen by the narrator, was so covered with figures and calculations that not a spot remained for another sum or column.

In 1839, Prof. Espy, by invitation, visited England for the purpose of explaining his theory of storms before the British Association of Science. On the occasion of presenting his theory before them, many eminent scientists were present, including Sir John Herschel, Sir David Brewster, Mr. Redfield, and others. The discussion which followed was one of the most interesting ever published in the reports of the association. Many weeks were spent most delightfully in visiting the "stately homes" of the country, where

Mr. Espy and his wife were hospitably entertained.

Later in the same year, he visited Paris, where a committee had been appointed by the Academy of Science to receive him, presided over by the illustrious Arago, who was enthusiastic in his reception of the "storm theory," as presented to them in the lectures before the academy by its discoverer. In the debates on the question, Arago remarked that "England had its Newton, France its Cuvier, and America its Espy."

After Mr. Espy's return to America, he published his great work, "The Philosophy of Storms," and was employed by the war department at Washington to prosecute his investigations in atmospherical currents and disturbances, and to receive reports from distant points of observation—of which many volumes were published. He was at the same time connected with the Smithsonian Institute as corresponding member. His life, during his residence at the Cap-

ital, was a very happy one, the work in which he was engaged being so congenial to his tastes and favorite pursuits. There he remained many years, spending his periods of rest at Harrisburg with dear friends and relatives.

In his later years his mind dwelt much on subjects of mental and moral philosophy. He then published a short "Treatise on the Will," which embodied some ideas both original and striking. Mr. Espy's early religious teachings were of the sternly Calvinistic type of the old Scotch Covenanter, his more immediate ancestry having been of that faith; but, as he advanced in years, he discarded some of the dogmas, among them the doctrine of eternal punishment, which he found repugnant to the chief tenet of his creed, that "God was a being of Infinite Love." While he admitted that there might be some form of punishment awaiting the evil, he believed it to be probationary, and not the final and eternal doom of any, however wicked. The subjoined

extract from his last "Will" will serve to show his childlike and reverent spirit on religious subjects :

"In the beginning of this my last will and testament, I wish to express my most profound reverence for the Supreme Ruler of the Universe and my unwavering belief that every thing which I have experienced during my life (as well the pains and the pleasures) has been so arranged by His infinite goodness and wisdom as to result in good to me, by directing me to a higher state of knowledge and to a more intense love of goodness, and so to prepare me for an eternity of happiness after death. If it is better for me to exist happy, I shall so exist, as certain as there is a God of infinite goodness, wisdom, and power ; but, if it is better for me to suffer some pain hereafter for the sake of further improvement, I doubt not that an infinitely good and wise Father has so arranged it that I shall so suffer. Heavenly Father, with unwavering confidence in thy

love, I commit myself and the whole human family, thy children, to thy holy keeping."

After some legacies to relatives, of moneys and property, he adds :

"I wish that Professor A. D. Bache, of the Coast Survey, shall have my microscope; Professor Joseph Henry, of the Smithsonian Institute, my telescope; and the Hon. Charles Brown, of Philadelphia, my watch."

What an illustration of the "development theory" is shown in the wonderful advancement of the Signal Service Commission! Its present condition as a power for great use to the community recognized by all; its well-appointed quarters so thoroughly supplied with the improved mechanism which science has provided for carrying on the important work for which it has been so thoroughly organized and equipped; its corps of efficient workers in communication with stations established from shore to shore, from mountain to sea, and so well sustained by the



government to which it is an honor—and all this the outgrowth of a germ planted forty years ago, by the establishment of the Bureau for Meteorological Observation, and which was for several years so vigorously opposed by many of our Congressmen that it was with great difficulty the necessary appropriation for sustaining it could be obtained by its friends. Much is due to the enthusiasm and untiring exertion in its behalf of the late Alexander H. Stephens, a warm personal friend of Prof. Espy and an early, earnest believer in the practical advantage to be derived from his discoveries.

During a visit to Cincinnati, in 1860, Prof. Espy died, at the ripe age of seventy-four years. His remains were interred in Harrisburgh, Pennsylvania, where, ten years before, his wife had been laid to rest. Students of nature are usually of serene and happy temperaments, and Mr. Espy was no exception to the rule. He never seemed impatient or concerned at the slow recog-

nition of his discoveries as means of practical use in commerce or other national needs. He would say, "I leave all this to the future, sure that its adaptation to the uses of life must one day be seen and acknowledged." He left no children, and but few are now living of his near relatives, but those few remember with reverence the broad charity and earnest purpose of the "Storm King."

